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PLAIN
ARGUMENTS
IN
DEFENCE
OF THE
PEOPLE'S
ABSOLUTE DOMINION
OVER THE
CONSTITUTION.
IN WHICH
THE QUESTION OF
Roman Catholic Enfranchisement
IS CONSIDERED.

304,4
304,5
1724

In chapter on
Roman Catholicism

Ἀνὴρ γὰρ ἰδιώτης ἐν πόλει δημοκρατουμένη, νόμῳ καὶ ψήφῳ βασιλεύει.
ÆSCHYNES.

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M.DCC.XCII.



TO THE

PEOPLE OF IRELAND.

THE bulk of mankind are neither deep politicians, nor abstruse reasoners. They judge of forms of governments by their effects, and estimate their own rights by instinctive feelings; from these simple and, I will say, wise principles, have you been impelled to question the goodness of the present constitution of the House of Commons, and to endeavour to amend it.—No power on earth can do this, but the people. The artificial force of government will always contend for present establishments, and is superior to every thing, but the natural strength of the community. True and acknowledged as this is, many deny your right of interference, and oppose the cavils of law and delusions of sophistry, to the conclusions of experience and the dictates of

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nature. I do not fear you will be easily dissuaded from a pursuit, not more splendid in its success, than it will be calamitous in its failure. Though destitute of that constitutional controul over your governors, without which no nation can be securely happy, you have hitherto restrained the insolence of despotism, by the known spirit and generosity of your nature. — You will not by supineness on the present occasion, forfeit even that security, for the future. — I do not think you will, or that my endeavours are necessary to give you ardor or perseverance. — It may however be satisfactory to you to find, that what you have done perhaps principally from the instinct of nature, can be defended by the most rigid reasoning; and that the plainest understanding can *demonstrate* the propriety of your proceedings.

The justification of the National Convention is clear, obvious and conclusive. — The constitution of a nation is, if not the workmanship, at least the property, of the people; whether it originated in force, fraud, or wisdom. Whether it was at once conceived and executed, or was the gradual result of various experiments; or the accidental offspring of political commotions; whatever may be its origin, age, or growth, the people are its owners. — The present race of men, by adopting it, have made it their own, and the experience of all ages and countries corroborates every man's reason and uncorrupted feelings, in proving, that they have a right to make what-
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ever alterations in it shall appear necessary to their happiness and security. — Instances of an exercise of this right are innumerable, but unnecessary ; for the inalienable rights of a people depend not upon precedents, and cannot be abridged by any earthly authority. — This doctrine is as safe as it is evident.

It will not produce (what courtly politicians ascribe to it) a spirit of disobedience to government ; nor would the contrary opinion (however such men may love it) eradicate every principle of resistance. — Salutary government will ever meet general approbation, nor can the murmurs of a few factious or foolish men disturb its tranquillity. — But let men reason as they may, human nature will shrink from oppression. That constitution which threatens general unhappiness, will excite general detestation.

It will be felt like an earthquake in every corner of the nation, and the people will quit their rulers, as they would their houses, lest they should fall upon and crush them.

But though the people have a right to reform, alter, or even dissolve the constitution, it does not follow that every alteration should require their immediate agency.

Whilst any constitution exists, the legislature ought to be the medium of acquiring such improvement. — Not that the legislature has a right of itself to alter the constitution ; but that it is the safest, wisest, and perhaps most constitutional

means, through which the people can accomplish their wishes.

If there be any limitation to the power of the legislative it is, that they shall not transfer the power vested in themselves to others.—That they shall not change the form of government.—That they shall not alter the constitution. — They are authorized to make laws, but not legislators.

Their will, properly promulgated, is to be the rule of civil action ; but they shall not do any thing by means of which they will be superseded or succeeded in their legislative function, by men differently chosen from those, to whom the people have entrusted legislative authority.

The appointment of the legislature, and the actual exercise of legislation, are widely different.—The former is the original act of the people either forming a constitution, or adopting one already formed ; the latter is a derivative authority limited to those to whom it is entrusted.—Whatever is the form of government, whether *monarchical*, *aristocratical*, *democratical*, or *mixed*, the legislature that obtains therein, derives its authority from the consent of the people, either directly or impliedly given, to be governed by laws enacted by such legislature.

But though acquiescence under the constitution that exists in any country, where it is not extorted by military force, is sufficient evidence of the consent of the subject to the legislature that governs therein, it cannot be evidence of consent to a legislature of a different kind. On the

the contrary, the people's silent voluntary acquiescence under a particular legislature, is the strongest proof the case can admit of, that they do not wish it changed.—It must therefore undeniably follow, that no legislature of any country can be justified, without the express approbation of the people, in making any alteration in its own frame — and this is equally and universally true of all countries and constitutions, and cannot be denied by any man, who does not think that every thing which can be done is rightfully done. I know the British and Irish Parliaments have repeatedly made laws affecting the duration of one branch of the legislature, and regulating or altering the qualification of electors, and mode of election. I know likewise, if my proposition be true, in its extent, many if not all of those acts were unjustifiable ; but I deny that the maxims of moral or political truth can be invalidated by instances of violation, or that it would follow from Parliament being justified in these instances (even allowing that such exercises of power were justifiable) that it has a right of itself to new model the House of Commons, either by amputating the boroughs, or counteracting their influence, by the creation of a number of new legislators. —This is an extensive and important alteration, which it is not entitled to make, unless instructed so to do by the people, whose duty, interest and right it is to give it such instructions.

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I do not mean by the people the electors only — In every question between the governing and governed, in every question that relates to the establishment of a constitution, or the alteration of one already established, when the rights of the people are talked of, the whole community is understood, under which term is comprehended, not only the electors, but every individual, who owes natural allegiance to the state, contributes to the expences of government, or is a natural born subject thereof, or admitted to the rank of one by naturalization, denization, or whatever established authorized mode of communicating a right of Citizenship, exists therein — when such a question arises in our constitution, it would be absurd in the highest degree to take the electors for the people. — They bear a very small proportion to the mass of the community, and might consistently with the forms of our constitution, bear a much smaller. — There is no argument to prove that in the present state of representation they should be taken for the people, which would not prove the same thing, if the representation were much more imperfect; and if the principle were once admitted, the constitution might moulder to decay without any radical energy to restore it, and a great majority of the community languish under the weight of undeserved oppression, without having a right to use their own hands to extricate themselves; a rigorous law, which (how palatable soever it may be to human legislators) the Author of all things

things would never have imposed on his creatures.—The electors should perhaps be considered in our constitution as a component part of the legislature ; and in a question of this nature, they certainly will not be hardly dealt with, if they are allowed the weight of an equal number of other Citizens. — They are certainly that part of the public, in which the monopoly that is complained of, resides.—For what is it you complain of, but that the election franchise, which ought to be extended to every one whose disfranchisement is not conducive to the public good, is confined to a few, and those not selected from the rest by any distinguishing mark of superior public virtue, or more enlightened intelligence? I say, therefore, if the government be oppressive or inconvenient, and require to be reformed, the governed, that is the people, and not the electors, who are part of the legislature, and perhaps the morbid part of it, are the proper judges of such necessity ; and it is their express declaration alone, or at least their consent by indubitable implication, that can justify the legislature in reforming itself.

I cannot here avoid taking notice of an argument, by which many well-meaning men are imposed upon to think, there exists no where an authority competent to the rectifying our constitution ; an argument which, if it were admitted, would equally prove, that a constitution the most destructive of human happiness, if it once existed, ought to be permitted to exist for ever — It is as follows. — The people cannot reform the constitution.

tution, for any act of theirs would be a dissolution of government; nor can the legislature reform itself, for no power is competent to alter the constitution, but the society at large.—It is somewhat surprising that Mr. Locke, the most luminous and sagacious writer that ever instructed mankind, should seem to countenance this error, as in some degree he does in the following extract.

Speaking of the folly of allowing a depopulated borough to send as many representatives to the House of Commons, as a flourishing and populous county, “ This, says he, strangers stand
 “ amazed at, and every one must confess, needs
 “ a remedy, though most think it hard to find
 “ one, because the constitution of the legislature
 “ being the original and supreme act of the so-
 “ ciety, antecedent to all positive laws in it, and
 “ depending wholly on the people, no inferior
 “ power can alter it—and therefore, the *people*,
 “ when the *legislature* is once constituted, *having*
 “ in such a government as we have been speak-
 “ ing of, *no power* to act as long as the govern-
 “ ment stands; this inconvenience is thought
 “ incapable of remedy ” The difficulty thus
 thrown in the way of a reform reminds me of
 the silly sophism against the possibility of motion;
 that as a body cannot move where it is or where
 it is not, it cannot move at all — a clear idea of
 motion removes the difficulty, by shewing that
 consisting in change of place, and requiring suc-
 cession of time, it ought not to be considered in
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respect of any one determinate point of space or instant of time. And in a manner somewhat similar we might allow the objection to the people by themselves, or the Parliament of itself re-forming the representation, and say, the Parliament may do it with the approbation of the people, or the people through the medium of Parliament:—For what prevents the Parliament, but that they have not the consent of the people, which is removed in the former case, and what prevents the people, but the supposed dissolution of Government, which is obviated in the latter.

Having stated, and proved that Parliament has of itself no right to alter its own constitution—that the people alone have a right, and are the proper judges when to exercise it;—that in this and every proposition where they are contradistinguished to the governing body, they do not mean the electors exclusively, but extend to the whole community;—that they ought not in wisdom exercise this right immediately by themselves, but through the medium of, and by application to Parliament.—From these few plain simple principles, I say, it will evidently follow, that the appointment of the National Convention was not only justifiable, but necessary—that no Parliamentary Reform could be rightfully obtained, unless that assembly, or some assembly of a similar constitution, authorised to act and speak for the people, communicated the wishes of the nation to the legislature. The only objection to this argument worth considering, is,

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that the Convention ought not to be considered, as such a representation of the people, that their measures should be taken as the measures of the whole community. Now, I say, an assembly constituted like that, ought to have been considered as speaking for the whole community, unless other more extensive classes of the community than those they represented differed from them, or the resolutions they passed were of such a nature that they could not possibly have been approved of by a majority of the people. They certainly spoke the sense of the Volunteers; and the uncontradicted sense of the Volunteers ought to be considered as the sense of the community. It ought not to be considered as necessary to the obtaining the sense of the community, that every individual, whether he be inclined or no, give his opinion. The best possible collection of the sense of the community is undoubtedly sufficient. In order to procure that, the people must assemble under some artificial description, or descriptions, and for the purpose of consultation, and to avoid disorder, must have recourse to delegates. The electors, it has been already said, are not an adequate description of the people, and have no exclusive right to act or speak on such an occasion. That description is best which is most numerous, and which most nearly extends to every man who has any interest or stake in the community, or who ought to be credited as a well-wisher of the constitution. Now, what man who had any interest at stake in the country, or
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who could reasonably require to be thought a well-wisher of the constitution, did not enter into the Volunteer Associations? What single description of the people is so general, or so fit to be made a standard of their sense, as that under which every man was ranked that pleased, and every man pleased to be ranked, who wished to enjoy constitutional freedom? No other description could contain so many, who did deserve, or so few who did not deserve the appellation of citizen.

When I assert that the Volunteers were the best *single* description of men from whom the sentiments of the nation could be collected, I do not deny that other classes of the people had a right to speak also: — they certainly had, and according as they confirmed or opposed the resolutions of the Volunteers, the opinion of the nation became more decided or dubious, and the obligation to give it effect more or less forcible. On this ground it is unnecessary to say, the Convention measures received much strength, and no weakness. I do not build the authority of the Volunteers on their military character, nor do I think military discipline, or the clothing of soldiers, should deprive them of the weight the same identical men would be otherwise in reason and justice entitled to.—If the standing army had an equal claim to attention in these respects, their resolutions ought to be equally regarded.—I have known the Volunteer character fashionable even in the House of Commons. — I remember when

Members of Parliament wore the livery of their Country ostentatiously—when every man in debate boasted of his new character, and the most salutary and splendid measures were carried by a majority in uniform.—I do not recollect that any one objected to the validity of these measures, that they were carried by Volunteers. —I do not think an Act of Parliament would lose its authority, if every man in both Houses, that voted for it was clad in military garment. —Much less do I think the original inalienable rights of a people can be extinguished by a character adopted for the preservation of the country and constitution. —It would be deplorable indeed, if the virtue of the people which vindicated their legislature should operate as a forfeiture of their own rights. —I wonder with what consistency the demand by an armed people of a reformed constitution could be reprehended by the very men, who extolled their spirit, and defended their conduct when they asserted the independence of Ireland.—The voice of the Volunteers was then allowed to speak the sense of the nation, and on the present question they were not less numerous or decided.—It can scarcely be argued that they had a right to vindicate their legislature, but no right to provide for themselves—or that an unjustifiable exercise of power in Great Britain would warrant every possible resistance, but no defect in the internal constitution of their own legislature would justify any interference. —The *salus populi* — the inalienable right the people must ever possess in every

every country and constitution of seeking security for their own happiness, whenever it is endangered *from at home or abroad*, is a principle of unlimited justification equally applicable to both cases.—Casuistry cannot discover any material difference.—I mention this charge of inconsistency with reluctance.—I know it extends to a few individuals who would not intentionally violate their duty to the people—who are incapable of offending against their own conscience.—I do not harbour the vulgar irrational sentiment, that a man cannot err and be honest.—There is nothing I would be more unwilling to inculcate than a quick oblivion of services.—Ingratitude is more pernicious even than credulity, and an eagerness to impute bad motives to known benefactors, even where we are persuaded argument is against them, is nearly allied to that odious failing.—The men I allude to in agreeing to an indirect censure of the National Convention, and consequently of the Volunteers, from whom it originated, have *so far* apparently forsaken their own principles, and impliedly reprobated their own past conduct. But as it is not within the reach of human degeneracy to repent of such conduct—as men of the best understandings do not always see the consequences that may be fairly deduced from their actions, and cannot therefore be necessarily concluded to favor such consequences.—As you have not discovered any inducements which could have tempted them to apostatise, and ought not to think them accessible to vulgar inducements:—

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As their fall would discredit patriotism, and even disgrace human nature—as their services merit indulgence, and their talents qualify them for reparation—suspend at least your judgment, till maturer iniquity extorts your censorial vengeance, or renovated public virtue (which is the more probable as well as more desirable alternative) redeems their error, and roots them in your affections.

I know the doctrines I advance, and the language I speak are peculiarly offensive to many fashionable ears.—I know the great solid principles of reason and nature, upon which Mr. Locke defended the Revolution, and which to question, would be indirectly to call the Prince upon the throne an usurper, are esteemed vulgar and visionary by many modern politicians, who would notwithstanding wish to be thought disaffected to his Majesty's Government.—I know original principles have always had an uncouth appearance to men, who viewing objects in the glass of fashion, and accustomed to see them adorned according to the taste, that prevails amongst the great, are shocked with the rude aspect of naked unornamented truth.—I know it will be thought as impolite to ask, by what principle of reason or nature, a man is a representative of the people *by birth*, as to question the title of a beauty to admiration, or of a woman of rank to give the law of dress. I am sorry however the former enquiry cannot be so safely suspended as the latter, and that the public good should
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force a man into the rudeness of such offensive speculations. — Liberty is too precious to be sacrificed to ceremony, and when you are groaning under the errors and oppressions of hereditary legislators, it is natural that you should blend some enquiries with your complaints. — I know it is from enquiries and complaints that you have of late so much become the object of fashionable antipathy. — But though you may be hated for such enquiries, they cannot render you despised. — Though patriotism is vulgar, self-love is fashionable, and the great will begin to respect you, when they find you are determined to take care of yourselves. To produce, at least to strengthen such determination—to inculcate that a Parliamentary Reform is the great measure about which it ought to be exercised, and in which it should be displayed — and to exhort you to that unanimity and perseverance, without which your efforts will be contemptible, and invigorated by which they will be irresistible, is the sole end of this address, and if I add a single motive to your activity, or contribute to remove a single obstacle to your success, my labour will be amply rewarded.

You have in Great-Britain a dreadful example of the insufficiency of a most extensive commerce, and a vigorous industry to counter-balance the evil of a defective constitution. If the trade of legislation generated and sustained by a monopoly of franchises has almost exhausted her resources, how long can you bear the double drain
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of foreign influence and domestic speculation?— Every argument for a Reform in Great-Britain, and they are numerous and cogent, applies with equal force to Ireland. — But the peculiarity of your situation furnishes you with one more weighty than all these united. — You have not only to fear the rapacity of your own Governors, but the influence of Great-Britain. — Whilst her legislative supremacy existed, the remnant of commerce she allowed you scarce kept you alive; — you have been upbraided with characteristic indolence; — but if inactivity be the necessary consequence of restraint, there was no justice in imputing to nature what was the growth of long oppression. — You are now, however, unfettered, and need no longer submit to the injustice or caprice of a rival in commerce. — Your own legislature alone can confine your exertions by sacrificing your interest to that of Great Britain, — But if they do sacrifice it, your condition is not amended. — If a saleable majority in parliament can be always easily purchased by an English Minister, your Free Trade will be a gross deception — it will be like a fine shew-board over an empty shop; — it may invite people to enter, but cannot detain them. — An English Minister commanding the whole patronage of Ireland, will find it no difficult task to influence a majority, who, having no constituents, need not fear the people. — If re-election to Parliament was risked by your displeasure, a sense of interest would in some measure compensate a defect of virtue. —

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The most corrupt Parliament, whilst they multiply the burthens of the people of England, will extend their commerce, and promote their prosperity, from the very same self-interested principle that prompts them to taxation. — However they may plunder the produce of their commerce, they can have no temptation to negotiate the fee-simple. — There is no powerful and connected rival, whose gratitude to individuals can be received as atonement for injustice to the public:—There is no extraneous power in possession of all the patronage of their government, to purchase a surrender of the rights of the nation, with the wealth of the nation.—Many men think the influence of the Crown in Great-Britain is salutary, but would any man continue in that opinion, if that influence were likely to operate in favour of a rival commercial nation, nay, if it were in the hands of the Minister of that very nation.—If England, for example, stood in respect of France, or Spain, or Holland, or any other nation, as Ireland stands in respect of England—if the Minister of that nation possessed the whole patronage of England—if his popularity at home very much depended on the advantages his country derived from a dextrous use of that patronage — if popularity at home were highly conducive to his continuing in power, but the detestation of the English nation might be consistent with the most decided parliamentary support in that country:—if such, I say, were the situation of Great-Britain, what uncorrupted Englishman, in his
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ferences, would not wish to see such influence dissolved, would not think his country wretched, if her existence as a commercial nation depended on the virtue of six or eight individuals, who were subject to the tampering of a foreign irresponsible minister, and had every inducement which avarice and false ambition could offer to sacrifice her interest? — Such exactly is the situation of Ireland. — It is the interest and probably the inclination of every minister to favour his own country. — He possesses the whole patronage of Ireland. — The unqualified subserviency of six or eight individuals is sufficient to give him a Parliament that will do any thing he wishes. — The measures of that Parliament are decisive of your prosperity. — Need I alarm you with the conclusion? — Need I mention how infirm are the props of your commerce? — How nugatory the attainment of a free Constitution? — How necessary to your security a reformation of your own Legislature? —

It may be objected that I argue as if there was as great a rivalry in commerce and opposition of interest between Ireland and England, as between England and any other nation. — It is not necessary to my argument that there should be so much: — It is sufficient if an English Minister be likely to think there is so much, as would induce him to narrow the commerce of Ireland, in order to enlarge that of Great-Britain. — What is the best argument of the probable opinion of a Minister on that head? — Experience of what has been the opinion of every Minister, who had
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ability to execute his wishes.—I need not tell you what that experience has proved. — If pain, as metaphysicians say, be the best aid of the memory, you cannot speedily forget it.—Nakedness and famine have united to rivet and record it.

Such arguments as these it may be said indicate an inclination to disturb the harmony, and break the connection between the two nations.— If the connection cannot be preserved without a constant subserviency of the Irish Parliament to the views of an English Minister, every argument that concluded to disconnection ought to be most sedulously inculcated:—if it can be preserved without such subserviency, arguments for a Parliamentary Reform are innoxious.—Now, I say, nothing can be so likely to endanger the connection, as the prevalence of an opinion in Ireland, that it is inconsistent with her commercial security; and nothing so likely to engender and spread that opinion, as to say, that an Irish Parliament, easily accessible to English influence, is necessary to its preservation.—For my part I think nothing can be so conducive to preserve permanent harmony between the two nations, as a Parliament in Ireland which will not be likely to betray her interests.—A Parliament dependant upon the people will not be so likely to betray them.—A Minister will not be supported by such a Parliament, but upon terms beneficial to the nation. — Men of following will lose their popularity and consequence, and the Minister cannot be benefited by their support, unless they pre-

serve their character ;—ambition will be legalized ;—the same men may be powerful and honest, popular, and in office. — I have often wondered that men of talents and knowledge of business, who at present possess borough influence, do not see that their consequence cannot be diminished by a reform. — Such men will continue to have influence, and it will be more respected by a Minister, being of a purer nature.—If they have good wishes towards Ireland, they may serve her without injuring themselves —At present having little weight in the councils abroad, they are seldom able to execute their good intentions at home, and when they do serve the public, their services are suspected and undervalued.—Accustomed to see English measures in almost every instance predominate, you have contracted an indiscriminate dislike of every man who supports Government, and do not distinguish between those of that number, who wish your prosperity, and promote it whenever they are able, and those who never think of any thing, but themselves. This confusion of character will be removed with its cause.

I have dwelt upon this head much longer than was my original intention.—You are all persuaded that a Parliamentary Reform is necessary to the freedom of your constitution, and security of your commerce :—You seek it with the sincerest zeal, and if one were to judge from your avidity in the pursuit, it could scarcely be thought possible, that you could be instrumental to your
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own defeat : — Yet, it is as true, as it is strange, that numerous and formidable as the difficulties are, which you must encounter from other quarters, the main difficulty will originate from yourselves. — The universal agreement and confederated strength of the whole community are necessary, not only as to the principle, but the particulars—not only as to the end, but the means.— In vain will you be united in your out-set, if in every step of your progress you separate from each other:—in vain will you press your demand on the Legislature with the awful energy of an united people, if, when the subject is unfolded, the inconsistent variety of your particular wishes renders your original agreement in the main business ridiculous and ineffectual.—Many questions are involved in a reform.—What shall be the qualification of an elector?—What, or whether any of a representative?—What the duration of Parliaments?—Shall Termers vote?—Shall Roman Catholics vote? Many others might be enumerated. Very few men will agree in all these particulars: if every man therefore adheres to his own judgment, will not variety and obstinacy of opinion rend the solid body of the community asunder?—What hope can you entertain that your divided dissipated exertions will subdue that aristocratical phalanx, which unity of interest, principles and opinions, cements and invigorates against you? — The only precaution I know against this danger, is, that every individual, after a temperate endeavour to bring over the public to his opinion, if he fails, should give his most sanguine

fanguine support to whatever plan shall have received the most general approbation. Every individual must contribute something to this sacrifice of opinion, and if Delegates are appointed you must all determine to support whatever plan they shall adopt. The only comparison an individual should in that case make, is between the system adopted, and that which at present exists. If the former shall appear preferable, and it can scarcely happen otherwise, as something will be gained, every man should exert himself to carry it into execution. But if individuals shall refer the adopted plan to any imaginary standard of perfection in their own minds, and will not support it, if on that comparison it shall appear defective, the best plan that human wisdom could invent, would be unsuccessful.— There is one subject which requires your most serious and unprejudiced examination, because a difference of opinion already appears arising upon it, which, if it shall gain ground, must necessarily be fatal to your expectations. — You already understand I allude to the enfranchisement of the Roman Catholics, who are a majority of those to whom I have addressed myself, and whose co-operation must be procured, or the great ground-work and justification of your proceedings (I mean the consent and union of the community) relinquished. The Monaghan grand jury seem so sensible of this, that when they thought proper to enter into a resolution, which could not fail to alienate the Roman Catholics, they also
resolved,

resolved, that none but the electors should interfere in rectifying the constitution.—A proposition false in theory, and foolish in practice, as I have already proved, and will still further illustrate.—Lord Charlemont's Answer to the Belfast Address, will, I fear, do much mischief.—The opinion of a man, whose life has been irreproachable, and whose popular station is so high, must necessarily attract many followers.—Had he assigned his reasons, I should not have feared their influence, but having stated his opinions and apprehensions, without revealing their origin, I must own I dread the weight of his authority, and the contagion of his example. I do not wish with the severity of a logician to scrutinize his Lordship's performance, on an occasion, upon which men are generally more sentimental than argumentative, and more studious of manifesting their zeal than explaining their opinions. But surely the novelty of discarding a majority of the people, in order to unite and strengthen them in a pursuit, in which they are ALL interested, and where the principles upon which they are justified apply equally to all, must naturally excite curiosity, and provoke observation.—As a man of sentiment, to begin with what predominates in his Lordship's answer, I would ask him, does he think the narrow spirit of intolerance will be likely to enlarge, enlighten, or ennoble the minds of his countrymen; or that genuine public virtue can co-exist with political bigotry?—As a man of parliamentary experience, I would wish to
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know from him, whether he thinks the reluctance of parliament to alter the present state of things will yield to the desire of a part of the people; when the disapprobation, at best inaction of a remaining majority will furnish them with a pretence, perhaps a justification in refusing them.—As a man who understands the human character, I would gladly hear from him, whether he thinks the Roman Catholics are without expectation on this occasion, or that it is within the reach of his influence or exhortation, or any possible influence or exhortation, to win their support of a measure, from the benefit of which they are to be suspiciously, and unnecessarily degraded.—As a man of deep political research, who understands the grounds and limits of those rights of the people, in the pursuit of which he has taken so leading a part, I wish to be informed, whether he thinks a requisition from the *governed* to the governing ought to be obeyed, unless it has the approbation of a majority of the *whole community*; and finally, as a man of common sense, I desire to hear, whether he thinks such a requisition will be obeyed. If he thinks, (as every man of common sense must) that Parliament will be under no obligation, in any rational sense of that word, to comply with *such a requisition*, and that they *will not* comply with it, it follows, that all the influence of his moderating councils should be directed to stop those meetings, and prevent those consequences, which must be frustrated zeal and ineffectual uproar. If his Lordship thinks
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the unhappy circumstances of Ireland necessarily preclude that co-operation of her people, from which alone she can hope a reformed constitution, his affection for his country will induce him to exert his great influence, to persuade his countrymen to acquiesce under a calamity, which, however grievous, ought to be borne with fortitude; because the only remedy it admits of is, *in his opinion*, a greater evil. It is, indeed, to be dreaded, that his countrymen, in the spleen of disappointment, may forget the purity of his motives, and that his popularity may suffer by his sincerity. This, however, being a sacrifice, which great men of all ages have made, when the good of their country required it, I doubt not his Lordship, when he next addresses the public, will lay open his real opinions, at the hazard of his reputation.

His Lordship will find a refuge from the levity of public opinion in the rigid embraces of those stern church of England men, who would preserve the boroughs to protect the church; that is, who would make slavery the shield of Protestantism; and if to that, he can add a consciousness of having acted a sincere and patriotic part, I doubt not his tranquillity will be undisturbed. In the mean time, others, who do not fear popery so much as his Lordship, and who love a free constitution at least as much, are justified in endeavouring to stop the progress of his opinions, and diminish the influence of his example. The author of an anonymous pamphlet

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can have no means of influence, but argument, and no recommendation to the public, but the soundness and liberality of the principles he inculcates : His Lordship, therefore, if he has acted from conviction, how ruinous soever to the nation he may think a departure from his opinions may be, can feel no solicitude from such a performance : Nothing under irresistible evidence can gain it a favourable reception ; and an honest man could not have his affections an instant divided between the good of his country, and the success of his opinions. I know the present parliament are not disposed to reform themselves : I know, that if every man in the House of Commons held himself bound to comply with the command of his constituents, the constituents of a great majority would instruct against any reform. — I am convinced nothing can lay an obligation on any man to vote against his own will, (I do not consider in this question, the obligation which conscience imposes, because we are looking after something of a firmer nature) and the will of his constituents, but the decided voice of an undoubted majority of the whole community. I am convinced nothing short of this, will induce such a member to do so. — What follows ? That if a majority of the House of Commons be against a Reform, and the constituents of a majority be against it also, the pursuit ought to be relinquished as hopeless, unless a majority of the whole people unite in it : And the question (which is too plain for argumentation) will then be, whether
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such a majority will be best procured by associating or alienating the Roman Catholic body. It is no answer to this to say, (what the Monaghan Grand Jury must have meant, if they had any serious meaning) that though the constituents of a majority of members be against the Reform, a majority of all the constituents of the whole nation collectively taken being for it, every member of the House of Commons will be under an obligation to comply with their wishes: For, I deny that a man who is not impelled to a measure by his own understanding, or instructed to it *by his particular constituents*, can receive any extrinsecal obligation to pursue it, except from the whole people, or (which is always to be considered as tantamount) a majority of them—much less can he be obliged to act against such a majority. A conscientious man may think that as he derives his authority through the men, who have elected him, so he ought to exercise it according to their will. But if he goes beyond his own particular electors—if he extends the description of men, whose opinions he will consider, or be governed by, why should he not extend it to the whole community? Why should he confine it to the remaining electors, who did not act towards appointing him, have no positive controul over him, and are but a small part of those whose happiness may be affected by his conduct?—No elector can pretend to impose any obligation on a member of parliament, who is not his particular representative, on any other ground but his being

a member of the community. He had no share in appointing him ; there is no positive compact existing between them. The obligation which reason and conscience points out to attend to such an elector arises from his being subject to the laws that are to be enacted, and extends equally to all who are subject to them. The obligation therefore arising to a member of Parliament to comply with the desire of these electors, who are not his particular constituents, must be strong or weak according to the proportion such electors bear to the community, and cannot therefore outweigh that arising from a majority of the community. — Since a majority therefore of the House of Commons are decidedly against a Reform — since the particular constituents of a majority would instruct against it — no man is so simple to hope the electors of boroughs would be instrumental to their own disfranchisement. Since the electors cannot even in conscience oblige such a majority — since nothing can either in fact or conscience oblige them, but a majority of the people at large — since that cannot be had without the co-operation of the Roman Catholics, which it is inconsistent with human nature to hope, unless they share the profit of it, it follows, that every thinking Protestant should instantly determine to renounce his prejudices, or relinquish his expectations.

For my part I think the present state of representation so great an evil, and the danger of popish pretenders so mere a bugbear, that I do not hesitate between the alternatives.

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I think it can scarcely be doubted, that we have no alternative, but to associate the Roman Catholics in our pursuit, or at once to abandon it—however, to make this plainer, I will briefly enumerate to my Protestant countrymen, the difficulties they have to encounter, that they may be the better judges, whether it be possible that they shall succeed by their separate exertions.

I pass over the objections, which many weak, though indeed well-minded men, have to every thing that appears in the shape of innovation—I omit the division, and consequent weakness, which a diversity of opinion on so complicated a subject may produce amongst the most sanguine and sincere.—I will suppose the Protestant people of Ireland pursue this measure with one mind, one heart, one will—yet when I consider the difficulties you have to encounter, do I think it impossible you should succeed by yourselves.—What have you to contend against? The aristocracy of Ireland cannot without betraying their dearest interests (and treachery of that nature has never been imputed to them) comply with your wishes.—The Parliament of Ireland under subjection to that aristocracy will not favour them—an English ministry will not favour them—They will not be inclined—they cannot if they were.

Wishing to substitute clandestine influence, for relinquished supremacy, they never will be instrumental to the destruction of those boroughs, which they consider as so many English fastnesses
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in our constitution. — But suppose them so miraculously disinterested as to wish you success. — Can they confer it? Under the present constitution of the House of Commons, they can have but little power, except through the medium of that aristocracy, which would be annihilated by a reform, and which never will submit but to the demand of an united, spirited, and persevering people.

This, perhaps, is the only measure which an English minister could not prevail upon them to carry — Unlimited in their obedience in all other respects, they will not consent to destroy all means of manifesting it in future — even the terror of ministerial vengeance could not extort such a compliance — on such an occasion, they would sacrifice even their places to their principles, deeming it a shameful violation of their morality to surrender the sources of their greatness; do not imagine they will comply with your wishes as readily now, as when you struggled against foreign usurpation.

In that contest your success was their aggrandizement — *stationed* by the misfortune of the constitution above the heads of the people, your rise was their elevation — *In the present contest*, you seek consequence by their depression, and must expect the most obstinate resistance. Thus the aristocracy of Ireland — the Parliament of Ireland, and the ministry of England being against you, and having nothing to oppose to so powerful a confederacy, but the justice of your cause, and the
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vigour of unanimity, will you be mad enough to alienate your Roman Catholic brethren? I may be asked, do the Roman Catholics themselves wish to be enfranchised? I will not answer, *I know* that they do — But I will say I know they are men — they are Irishmen — they live in a period of liberation — have caught the love of freedom from yourselves — and would disgrace you, themselves and their country, if in this moment of universal expectation they were indifferent, or hopeless. Suppose then that discarded by you, they consult by themselves. — Suppose when your plan of reform excluding Roman Catholics, and during the preparation of which you and your delegates expressly declare (for the question has arrived at that maturity, that you can no longer be silent upon it) against including them, a Roman Catholic petition praying to be included is also presented.

Will not administration avail themselves of this division? Will they not shelter themselves under your injustice, and plead your own monopoly against that of which you complain? But even though they should not petition, may not their probable disapprobation of a plan from the benefit of which they are precluded be pleaded against that consent of the people upon which you justify your demands? In your conventions of last year, any resolutions you passed, rather favoured than opposed the principles of Roman Catholic enfranchisement, and though you did not actually introduce it into your system, Par-
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liament could not have concluded you were against it, and therefore were not fairly in possession of that argument against you. They might have passed your system, and annexed to it the enfranchisement of Roman Catholics, and had grounds for thinking such conduct would have gratified a great majority even of the Protestant people. If Lord Charlemont's example be followed, this can no longer be the case, and Parliament will not only be included, but justified in resisting your wishes.

I will for a moment suppose you may expressly declare against their enfranchisement, and possess all the advantages of their co-operation; yet, even in that case, (which I admit, merely to fortify my argument) it is easy to prove their exclusion from franchises to be impolitic and inconsistent with your pursuit. The representation you seek is either of persons or property. Exact representation of persons is, perhaps no where attainable: In a country where bad policy and foreign oppression have kept the bulk of the people in a state of the extremest indigence and ignorance, it ought not to be attempted. Its greatest recommendation in any country is its simplicity, and the respect it pays to the natural equality of mankind. Now, if this mode of representation be adopted, and three fourths of the whole people by a single exception be excluded, will not the principle, which alone can recommend it, be in the first instance grossly violated? I will not dwell upon this head, because I think
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you are almost all of opinion that property ought to be made the ground and measure of representation, and principally, if not solely, that kind of property which is permanent, and the possession of which can be easily authenticated. Now, if the landed property of the nation be (as it ought to be) made the measure of representation, and that three-fourths of a commercial people are permitted to possess that property, without the annexed franchises, in the course of time, (and every reform is idle which does not promise to be permanent) will not a great part of our land be unrepresented, taxation separated from representation, the representation of the landed property, even in Protestant hands, become unequal, and imperfection similar to, and perhaps greater than the present boroughs arise? Why have we now to complain of the grievance of unequal representation? Partly because the fluctuation of wealth has so impoverished certain places, that they have no longer the qualification which should entitle, and originally did recommend them to that representation, which under the forms of the constitution they continue to possess: Partly, because by an abuse of the royal prerogative, franchises were originally disposed contrary to the principle of our constitution.—Whatever was the cause, the fact and grievance is, that a few individuals of little property return as many members to the House of Commons, as a great number that have much. Now if the landed property of the nation be divided into

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certain portions, and that a stated number of representatives are to be returned by the Protestant land-holders in such portions, and that the Roman Catholics may acquire property in them, without franchises. — If (I say) this be the constitution, and the Roman Catholics possess themselves almost entirely of certain portions, whilst others almost entirely continue in Protestant hands, will it not necessarily happen, that a very few Protestants in certain portions, will return as many representatives as a very great number in others? The very essence of unequal representation. The Roman Catholics are very unequally dispersed through the nation; and that their purchase will be irregular, as chance, convenience or caprice may direct them, cannot be doubted: But if the Roman Catholics are allowed freeholds without votes, how will you adjust the representation among yourselves? When your delegates enter into a detail they will be embarrassed with difficulties you perhaps at present little consider. Suppose the Ulster and Leinster delegates had a conference to adjust the number of representatives for their respective provinces. If all the land-holders were to have votes the adjustment would be easy. The magnitude and value of the provinces would give the proportion of their representatives, and these are things easily ascertained. But if Leinster will not comply with Ulster in allowing Roman Catholics to vote, will not Ulster fairly require a subduction of Leinster representatives proportional

tional to the quantity of land, that in time will probably be disfranchised by Roman Catholic possessors? The representation should in that case be (if a permanent equality is what you seek) proportional, not to the magnitude of the provinces, but the quantity of land likely to continue in Protestant hands. Now almost all the landed property in Ulster is likely to continue in Protestant hands, and a large portion of Leinster is likely to be possessed by Roman Catholics; so that if this consideration be not observed, the seeds of speedy inequality will be laid in your reform, and if it be observed, adjustment will be almost impossible. From these considerations, I think such men as are of opinion that Roman Catholics ought not to be considered in a reform, must, if they reflect, be also of opinion, that Ireland is precluded by an incurable and indispensable evil, from the advantages of an equal representation, and that in seeking it, we hazard the danger of recurring to first principles, and shaking an established constitution, without being able to apply these principles, or repair that constitution. For my part, if I thought the Roman Catholics ought not to have votes, I would lament the hour they were allowed to have freeholds—I would lament the repeal of the penal statutes-- not that I approve of these statutes.—Who at this day approves of them? Who does not reflect with abated resentment upon the past oppressions of Great-Britain, when he considers how tyrannically they, who were enslaved them-

selves, oppressed others? That three-fourths of a commercial people should be precluded from any share of the soil — that the bar, the revenue, the army --- that all places of honour or emolument should be shut against them—that intermarriage with Protestants, that great source of amity and reconciliation, should be prohibited, that they should be confined as to the cultivation of their minds to such a pilfered literature as persecuted pedagogues could convey, or such barbarous philosophy as could be smuggled from foreign and hostile universities, under the severest prohibition; as if ignorance were an antidote against superstition, or the religion and government of the land could not bear the light. Is there any man of this day, to whom such restrictions do not appear cruel and impolitic? Yet, to allow them landed property, and deny them votes, appears to me nearly as cruel, and yet more impolitic: Cruel, inasmuch as we have stationed them at the very verge of freedom, and deny their progress; and impolitic, inasmuch as representation, and taxation will be disunited.

I am apprized several will object to their enfranchisement that it will lay the foundation of further claims.

It is a bad apology for refusing justifiable demands, that unjustifiable may be made, particularly if, as in the present case, concessions will not disable us from resisting pretensions, if they should become dangerous. The most sanguine of the Roman Catholics, with whom I have con-

versed on that subject, do not desire more, than than 50l. Freeholders should be allowed to vote in choosing the representatives of whatever place their estate is situated in — if this were granted, and that it should happen in the course of time, that half the landed property of the nation should be in the possession of Roman Catholics, even in that case, if the Protestant 40s. Freeholders continue to vote as at present, the Roman Catholic electors would be but one twenty-sixth part of the electors of the nation, and if the qualification to Protestants were raised to 10l. the highest any man wishes it, they would be but one-sixth of such electors. — This calculation lessens the true disproportion by not making any allowance for the quantity of land that would be distributed amongst Roman Catholics in portions too small to qualify them to vote. — It was also too great a concession to the adversaries of this measure, to argue, as if half the landed property should come into their hands — If their religion were to continue as general as at present it is, and their industry to be as great as possible, such a change of property could not happen within several centuries. — No thinking man of reading and experience, can doubt, but that popery is decaying, and likely to decay all over Europe, and that in our country it will wear out, faster than the possessions of the Roman Catholics will accumulate, unless we prop their superstition with their resentment, and keep their prejudices alive by maintaining our own. — But what is it we have to
fear ?

fear ? — The idle hobgoblin rumours of popery and the Pretender have now lost their terror.— The Pope is no longer the formidable being he was — We no longer dread to become tributary to the See of Rome—to have our wealth exhausted by plundering Legates, and our spirit subdued by terrific interdicts.—The fulmen brutum of his authority is compleatly extinguished, and never can be rekindled.—Can we then answer it to our Roman Catholic brethren to let groundless antiquated apprehensions obstruct the free progress of an enlightened toleration ? Can we answer it to ourselves to sacrifice our constitution to our prejudices ? Can we answer it to posterity to let this opportunity of reforming the constitution pass away, when we could have laid the liberties of Ireland on the widest and firmest foundation.

It may be still objected, that the principles from which I have reasoned, would prove too much, and conclude to admitting them even into the legislature, which would be inconsistent with the safety of the established Church.—I allow the established religion should be protected in all countries on principles of policy, and much more in our country, on account of its superior excellence.—I would guard it even at the price of some detriment in the constitution, and therefore do I think they should be wholly excluded from the legislature, and admitted to election franchises with great advantages against them — any thing further is going beyond this necessity — It cannot endanger the Church that they should have some influence

influence over men, who have the disposal of their lives, liberties, and properties. If they have none, they are slaves—this every fair man would give them, provided he could be certain their influence in Parliament could be confined to these articles, and not extend to religion. — How then should you proceed in order to give them an influence in the legislature, which could not from its nature extend to religion, if it ever should become an object of legislation? By allowing them to be electors, but not legislators.—The representative, whom they in common with you shall elect, may attend to their wishes in all other respects, but being himself a Protestant, and sworn to maintain the ascendancy of that religion, never can be prevailed upon to do any thing injurious to it.

The very nature of the constitution, and of the danger to be guarded against points out election franchises as the proper boundaries between toleration and policy; political freedom and the safety of the Church—Is there a politician on earth who being asked, how he would limit the indulgence granted to Roman Catholics in a constitution like ours, would say, I would allow them to have that, which is the ground and measure of representation, but would not allow them in any degree to be represented? If he wished to strengthen their religion by animosity, to undermine the constitution, by taking precaution, that taxation and representation, which should always preserve parallellism, should be daily diverging,
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and to give them at the same time an hatred of the constitution and strength to injure it, he would advise the identical establishment of things that now exists. — No wise man, who loved the constitution, and understood its true principles, would advise it, or wish its continuance.

There is another objection derived from the moderation of their wishes, which it may be proper to notice. — If, it may be said, franchises limited as I have mentioned, will give to Roman Catholics as little influence as I have stated, can we suppose they seek them with any other view, but that they may be enabled thereby to penetrate more deeply into the constitution? and secondly, will not the evil of stripping the landed property of representation, still in a great degree continue? To the first argument I answer, they know little of the human disposition, who do not think the mere rank of electors independent of any real influence it may create, might be highly gratifying. The principal conflicts of this world are about things much more unsubstantial. If they had any share of political liberty, how inconsiderable soever it might be, they would certainly consider their condition as much bettered. Every Protestant considers himself as free, not because he votes for a representative, for few have that privilege, but because he may arrive at it by a certain exercise of industry and attainment of property. The lowest and meanest amongst you has it in his power by moderate industry to procure the qualification, and consequently the
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suffrage of an elector. But the most unremitted application to commerce, or splendid services to the community, cannot raise a Roman Catholic to that dignity. Such a condition must either debase their nature, or render them disaffected to the constitution under which they live. But surely with a Protestant House of Commons, a Protestant House of Lords, a Protestant King, and an English Protestant nation to protect your religion, you cannot think such a trifling concession can endanger it. The second objection has more weight. I confess, by rating their qualification so high, and restraining their influence so much, the true principle of representation will be still violated: But it will be violated in a lesser degree than if they had no votes at all. If their religion decays, which I think will be the infallible consequence of this tolerating measure, you may with safety reduce the qualification, and even though you should not reduce it, the effects of this violation will be lessened by such an event: And, lastly, though this limited scheme of Roman Catholic enfranchisement will not produce perfect representation, it is certainly preferable to a continuance of the present system; and I have already sufficiently proved and inculcated, that you must either live under the constitution as it now stands, or invite the Roman Catholics to assist you in rectifying it.

To you, my countrymen, I have submitted my arguments and opinions without reserve, and if I have been prolix upon obvious topics, let it

be considered, that how plain soever the evidence of your wants and your rights may be, it cannot be too frequently obtruded upon those, whom avarice and ambition blind, and who seek a shelter from the indignation their conduct inspires, in the darkness they strive to propagate. Like Ajax in battle, you require but light. Whoever enables you to see your true interests, renders your adversaries impotent, and you irresistible. Continue your demands for a reformed Parliament. Whether you assemble as Volunteers, or in any other character, in county meetings, or conventions, or both, is not material, provided it shall appear from the constitution of your assemblies, and your conduct in them, that *the whole nation* unites in the demand, and must be gratified;—above all things guard against intemperance. The only hopes of your adversaries arise from the difficulties you must encounter in acting, and intemperance always encreases these difficulties. Timorous men will fall off from you, if you shew any indication of violence, and Parliament will have a pretext for slighting your measures, as not really the measures of the nation, if your meetings be tumultuous and disorderly. The indecent contempt with which you have been recently treated, I know has a tendency to inflame you;—but I trust you have not so impotent a spirit as to be hurried into violence injurious to yourselves. They were bad politicians, and did not understand you, who hoped such an effect from their own misconduct. Let them

them heap insult upon insult, wrong upon wrong—the sense of injury is of an elastic nature;—the greater the oppression, the more forcible the recoil. Arm yourselves with patience and fortitude, and you may depend upon it, the fullness of your injuries will be the plenitude of your power, and that if ever your suffering shall exceed the patience of wise and virtuous men, every thing must sink beneath your resentment. This is a crisis I hope and believe never will arrive. Anger is a melancholy reformer, and wretched is the nation, that must resort to violence, to procure the blessings of peace. You never will be driven to this hateful extremity: Parliament is too prudent to force you to bring the inherent, tho' latent powers of society, into action: to do that immediately by yourselves, which, *whilst Government stands*, never can be done, but through the medium of the legislature. That your perseverance and the prudence of Parliament may co-operate in reforming the constitution, is the most earnest prayer of

THE AUTHOR.



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